The South Bail Gates of Lincoln

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Introduction
The aims of this paper are to establish some historical context for the South Gate of the Bail, demolished in 1774 and thought to have been built in the early thirteenth century; to consider the topographical development of the area straddling the line of the south wall of the Roman Colonia and to place on record the tenemental history of the various neighbouring properties.

1) The Roman South Bail Gate
The Roman legionary fortress at Lincoln was founded in the middle of the first century, c. AD 50. The position of the gates of the fortress and succeeding colonia have been established and it is clear that there are fundamental differences between the East Gate of the colonia, which has two carriageways, and those to the north and west, which have single carriageways.

The number of carriageways possessed by the South Gate is uncertain. Richmond and Thompson both suggest that it had a single carriageway, which would give the fortress and colonia a symmetry around its east-west axis. The discovery of a sketch by Nathan Drake of the South Gate of c. 1740-50 (Fig. 1) has led to the suggestion that in fact the South Gate had two carriageways. In this case one might suggest that the South and East Gates were the major points of access to the walled area, although a consideration of the setting of the fortress might suggest that if the gates reflected the degree of traffic the North and South Gates should have been larger than those to the east and west.¹

A vestige of the Roman gateway, leading to the upper city, may still be seen in the form of a vertical section set into the wall between 25 and 26 Steep Hill, on the west side of the hill. From the available evidence, this must be the western side of the central (or western) carriageway. For the corresponding eastern side there is nothing visible above ground, but some masonry has been recorded in the cellar of 44 Steep Hill, formerly the Leopard Inn.² The front face of the gate is marked by the abrupt change of alignment in the street frontage line between nos. 44 and 45 (Joy's).

This Roman gateway (or its medieval successor) is mentioned several times in the Hundred Rolls, usually by the term porta Balli, implying that it was regarded as the official entrance to the Bail.³ Also implicit in this phrase is the acknowledgement that the Castle authorities, landlords of the Bail, regarded it as their property and responsibility. By way of further corroboration for this point, the hereditary Constables of the Castle still controlled much of the land directly under the Roman wall, particularly on the west side: Nicholaa de la Haye granted the site of the later 25 Steep Hill c. 1220-22 to Peter Waisdaru (the wood seller). A late thirteenth century endorsement on this deed refers to this property as situated between the gates of the Bail and the city above hill, 'iacente inter portas Ballii et civitatis supra montem'.⁴

It may be assumed then that until the early thirteenth century the Castle controlled access to the upper city. They also controlled the wall (or its remnants) together with such of the abutments as were extant; as the wall itself fell victim to changing circumstances and sundry housebuilders these pieces of land were disposed of. This happened at the west side of Steep Hill, and the Roman wall line there is almost

Fig. 1  Pen and wash sketch of the South Gate of the Bail, Lincoln, by Nathan Drake c.1740-50. Reproduced by kind permission of the Usher Gallery, Lincoln.
impossible to trace on the surface. On the east side however, the line of the wall appears to survive for its whole length as the southern boundary of the Cathedral precinct, the Close. Although the Close Wall was not formally established until the close of the thirteenth century, the boundary it was to follow here was already marked, although, as indicated below, there is some doubt about whether it actually did so.

As to how long the Roman gateway survived, there is no firm indication. Certainly parts of it were standing during the thirteenth century, but by the time of Nathan Drake's depiction of it in the mid-eighteenth century there was little to be seen. From this work more of it was visible on the east than on the west, but certain aspects of this drawing are curious. In the centre of the picture, just behind the remains of the gateway stands the inn known as the Fiddle and Trumpet, renamed the Leopard in 1781. This is the house in whose cellar the real remains are. Drake has added somewhat to the existing remains with a blocked archway and return wall to the north which are not known from any other source. Added to this is the further complication that Drake composed this view in 1730, at which date the view of the Harlequin would have been blocked out. The City Gate. Drake's artistic licence has made for a thoroughly romantic picture, but one which is less than faithful rendition of the original.

Nevertheless, the reconstruction of this gate, in its original Roman state, as having two carriageways receives support from the Hundred Rolls. It has long been acknowledged that the properties on the eastern side of Steep Hill from the Leopard Inn northwards were purpurest on the original carriageway. If the evidence of the cellar is anything to go by, and it is corroborated by the reference to these properties in the Hundred Roll, the roadway in the early post-Conquest period was much wider, extending eastwards to the line of what is known as the Preceptor's Wall. There will be further discussion of this range of buildings in Fascicule IV of The Survey of Ancient Houses in Lincoln.6

2) The City Gate

Strictly speaking, this gateway was not intended to be a gate into the Bail, but quite the reverse, a gate into the City. It was consequently never called the Bail Gate until the early eighteenth century, and the earliest references we have all refer to it as the City Gate. The feature stood a few yards to the south of the remains of the Roman gateway, sufficient of which was still standing in the thirteenth century to merit a mention in the Hundred Roll.

As to the age of the City Gate, the best clue can be found in the Hundred Rolls where there is a reference to an escheat having been made of properties 'inter veterem portam Ballii et novam portam per Mossi Bosse judeum ex parte occidit' et per Willelum de Tilbroc ex parte orient...7 i.e. between the old gate of the Bail and the new gate, by Mosseus Bosse the Jew on the west (24-25 Steep Hill) and by William of Tilbrook on the east (45 Steep Hill). This escheat comes in the wake of the Barons' Revolt of 1217 and must have been made before 1220, in which year William was murdered. This implies that the City Gate had only recently been built, certainly within the previous thirty to fifty years; the old gateway was ruinous and a new one would suit a variety of purposes. The fact that these particular tenements were eschated lends further weight to the defensive aspect, as does a later reference in the Hundred Rolls to the Norman House (47 Steep Hill) which as late as 1266 is described as a detriment to the defence of the city.8

Presuming, as we must for lack of contradictory evidence, that the gate remained unaltered until the early seventeenth century, we can build up a picture of its layout. Like other gatehouses in the Bail and Close, the South Gate consisted of a simple carriageway approximately fifteen feet wide situated on the west side of the present roadway, surmounted by a leaded chamber, with rooms and shops on the ground, and chamber floors on each side of it. On the east side these rooms would have been on part of the present roadway (Fig. 2). The beam joints for the upper storey may still be seen embedded in the stone wall of the present 46 Steep Hill, and stonework at the division between 46 and 47 is a further pointer to the exact position and dimensions of the eastern portion of the gatehouse. A lease of 1618 gives some measurements of the holding.9

The Common Council of the City were active landlords, and we have information on leases and occupiers from the mid-sixteenth century until the demolition of the gate in 1774. For tenancy purposes the holding was divided into two leaseholds; the western portion consisted of rooms and shops on the west side and the leaded chamber over the carriageway, and the eastern portion comprised the lower and part of the upper floor on that side. The western leasehold was valued at 5s. per annum, with a quit-rent of six fat chickens or two shillings, and the eastern tenement at 12d. with a quit-rent of one fat mallard or one shilling.10

In 1618 came the first recorded attempt to demolish the structure. Gregory Lowcock, mercer, obtained a lease of the western part as well as permission to demolish and rebuild it. However, no such work appears to have taken place, but the 'outline planning permission' appeared regularly on subsequent leases, as in 1717 where this right was reserved to the Mayor, Sheriffs and Commonalty.11 Obviously the main drawback of such a feature, the restriction of the carriageway, was more of an obstruction in peace time than it had been of advantage in more unsettled times.

During June 1774 an order was made by the Common Council for the acquisition of both leases, and the necessary surrenderers were made by the end of August. On 22 September following, the gate was ordered to be taken down and the necessary alterations to neighbouring properties were to be done at the city's expense. By the following July the work was complete and some land on the western side made over on a building lease to William Willson.12

In its latter days a number of small shopkeepers had set up in the various rooms of the gatehouse. Among them was an old woman who sold sweets to the scholars at the Bluecoat (Christ's Hospital) School around the corner. One of these boys, Robert Bristow, recounted this tale to Edward James Willson, the architect and antiquary; another of Willson's aged interviewees recalled a Mr Julian, grocer and brecches maker, who also had a shop there.13 Other occupiers may be identified from the various leases and assignments.

The brick built tenement erected by Willson in 1775 survived until c.1878 when it was demolished to make way for Wordsworth Street. This roadway was constructed to link Steep Hill with Drury Lane and, more importantly, the main entrance to the newly established Theological College, which had just taken over a site vacated by the County Hospital.14

3) Topographic development around the South Gates of the Bail

Despite the survival of parts of the Roman gate and the Norman House there is very little known for certain about the topography of this area either in the Roman period or later. The sequence of development and alteration of the south wall of the Fortress/Colonia/Bail is clearest to the east of the gate where excavations by Dennis Pett in the grounds of the Old Bishop's Palace established that the surviving wall is actually a medieval rebuild, some ten to eleven metres to the north of the Roman line.15 Whether this medieval alignment ran parallel with the Roman one to the South Bail Gate or whether the two converged is unknown. Indeed, the assumption that the more northerly gate is indeed Roman has been questioned by Jones.16 To the west of the gate the line of the Roman wall has been established at Wordsworth Street and Drury Lane (Fig. 3).17
To the south of the Roman wall would have been a ditch, the northern lip of which was revealed by Petch in trench 2 of the Old Bishop's Palace excavation. The subsequent history of this ditch is not known. It is perhaps unlikely to have survived after the extension of the defences to include the Lower City in the second or third century, although the wall itself appears to have been rebuilt at a date subsequent to this extension. This ditch would probably have had butt ends where Ermine Street entered the upper enclosure but there is no reason why its remains should not have survived underneath properties to the north of Wordsworth Street and Christ's Hospital Terrace. Ermine Street itself would have run through the South Gate although there is no direct evidence for its width or position. What is thought to have been the west wall of the Roman sewer first discovered further north in Bailgate in 1878 was observed by C.L.A.U. in 1986 at the junction of Wordsworth Street and Steep Hill. This observation confirms that the Roman road continued due south from the Roman South Gate.

How much of the Roman topography survived through the Anglo-Saxon period is quite unknown. Elsewhere in the Bail remarkable survival is attested, such as the complete West Gate standing to first floor level when buried under the castle bank in the eleventh century. Excavations on the line of Ermine Street at Chestnut House, Michaelgate in 1984 established that a flight of steps had existed there in the Roman period but was buried under a spread of building debris containing no finds of post-Roman date. This debris was itself sealed by a metalled surface upon which were found sherds of tenth-century pottery. The surface was then covered with hillwash or make-up deposits and cut by a pit dating to the latest tenth or early eleventh century containing a coin of
Ethelred II (991-97). The evidence from this site hints that perhaps the Roman road alignment was in use in the tenth century whereas by the late tenth or eleventh century the medieval route along the Strait and Steep Hill had superseded it.

To the west of the gate major changes to the topography took place following the foundation of the castle in 1068. It is conceivable that the first Norman castle utilised the original Roman wall for its west and south defences but by the time that the Lucy tower motte was constructed the south wall of the castle had been moved north, presumably so that the Roman wall could act as a retaining wall for the motte. A stretch of walling identified by Patrick in 1890 as part of the south wall of the fortress lies across the line of what had been Castle Dykes, the c.30 metre wide ditch surrounding the castle. Whilst it is possible that the wall survived as a stub in the cathedral of the ditch it is worth noting that a property boundary is shown on the Duchy of Lancaster survey of the castle (1783) in the same position as Patrick’s wall. The Roman wall from Drury Lane to Steep Hill/Bailgate apparently survives in places incorporated into properties fronting on to Wordsworth Street and it may be this stretch of wall which Aaron the Jew was accused of encroaching upon in the Hundred Rolls (see below), since it has been established that Aaron held the block of land immediately to the north of this wall. It seems unlikely that the Roman ditch was ever recut along this stretch of wall and there is both documentary and architectural evidence to show that the site of the ditch was distributed amongst several landholders by the late twelfth century.

This documentary evidence reveals that whereas the line of the wall had lost its importance to the west of the gate, being merely one property boundary amongst others, on the east its importance continued. Properties to the north of what later became Christ’s Hospital Terrace are said to be in the churchyard of St. Michael and use the King’s wall as their northern boundary. Further east the bishop had to obtain the kings permission to breach the wall which separated the cathedral from his new palace even though it is now known through Petch’s excavations that this wall was a medieval rebuild and did not lie directly over the original, Roman wall.

As we have already noted, the properties on the east side of Bailgate from the South Gate northwards were purpurestes on the original carriageway. Consideration of the topography shows that this must also have been the case with those properties running south from the South Gate to the Norman house. It is unclear whether the original eastern edge of the road along this stretch was developed but seems unlikely. It was probably the case that the South Gate opened out onto an open space, the ancestor of the high market, and that this itself merged with the churchyard of St. Michael.

Although there is no evidence at present, it is likely that the encroachment upon the king’s highway took place in the later twelfth century at the time of construction of the Norman house and the complex to which it belonged.

Once this pattern of tenements had been established, the only major changes to the topography were the construction of the City Gate in or before the early thirteenth century, as described above, the destruction of this gate in 1774 and of the Bail Gate at some undated date between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries and finally, in 1878, the destruction of the small building constructed in 1775 on the site of the western chamber of the City Gate and the construction of Wordsworth Street, a widening and rationalisation of an existing passageway.

Tенemoral histories of neighbouring properties

26-34 Steep Hill

It is not the purpose in this present paper to give a full account of this very interesting range of properties, as they will be more fully covered in fascicule IV of The Survey of Ancient Houses in Lincoln. However, it may be worthwhile to discuss briefly the earliest evidence we have and say one or two things about the later development of this range. The Hundred Rolls list these houses, and indicate the whole body of property between Steep Hill and the Castle ditch, with Aaron the Jew. It reports an escheat to the King of all the houses inside (i.e. north of) the old gate of the Bail on the west by Aaron le Riche, Jew of Lincoln in length and breadth in each direction from opposite the Castle gateway as well as opposite the Castle ditch ‘un longitudinem habebat portam missa ex oppido fossat castri’.21 The escheated range was worth 60s. or more per annum whereas Aaron’s actual house was worth 6s. per annum. According to the Book of Fees this was escheated to the Crown, and was resold by the Contra of the Castle ‘occasioni castri’, i.e. for Castle purposes.22 This could mean that it was physically near to one of the Castle gateways or one of the walls. Perhaps, given the fact that Aaron held the whole block of land in question, his homus was sited to the north of this block, i.e. part of the present Castle Square, a site which would certainly have had a strategic importance to anyone holding the castle.

Numbers 26-34 Steep Hill are not recorded again before the sixteenth century when we begin to find references to them in the Common Fund accounts of the Dean and Chapter from 1549 onwards, paying a rent of 22s.4e. (eleven houses at 2s. each) to the Duchy of Lancaster.23 This date may be significant: 1548 saw the abolition of chaunties. However, the Liber de Ordinationibus Canonicarum does not specifically identify these properties. What is certain is that a further 10s. per annum accruing from this range was set aside towards the Dean and Chapter’s contribution to the upkeep of the master of the Grammar School, thus earning the apellation ‘Scole Lands’, mentioned in several of the later leases.24 For some unknown reason no. 30 may not have been included within this arrangement and needs some further investigation.

24-25 Steep Hill

There was a strong Jewish connection with both these houses. Benedict the Jew, possibly the one of the same name who was a son of Aaron, held a mortgage on property in this area in c.1180, and Mosse Boase also had an interest in a messuage here before his death, which must have occurred c.1217.25 Both properties became escheated to the Crown soon after. Number 25, mentioned above as having been granted by Nicholas to Peter the wood seller, was later (c.1245) conveyed to dom William de Wycheme-cumb, Canon of Lincoln, and was later sold to provide funds for the purchase of other property to endow his chantry, although, a quit-rent of one pound of wax was payable each year to the heirs of Nicholas.26

Little more is known about these properties until the sixteenth century when a few relevant title deeds may be identified as being enrolled in property purchased by the Governors of the County Hospital to expand their holding.

This was owned c.1550 by William Dighton, and subsequently by Christopher Wyll esforth. Then there is a gap in the record until 1720, when a pewterer named William Darby lived there. It was bought in 1771 by Edward Varlow, a blacksmith, and then in 1797 by George Lough of Branston, dyer.

Leopard Inn and properties northward to Exchequergate

As with the range opposite, a full account will appear in the forthcoming Civic Trust fascicle. The Leopard, the name which seems to have stuck with most historians, probably goes back as an inn and was associated with the innkeeper together c.1270 under Mag. William of Langworth, and were immediately acquired by the Vicars Choral.27 Near this would have been the shop left to his wife Matilda by Jocelea de Insula in 1238, ‘within the south gate of the Bail in the corner under the Kings Wall in the parish of St. Michael’.28

The occupiers of the shops running northwards were many and various. One stands out: Agnes the hatter, mentioned in the Chancery Cartulary in the early fourteenth century.29 There was a hatters’ row here (regina tenacium).
Property south of the Roman Gate

Apart from the rooms attached to the City Gate, all the property southward from the leopard on the east side was in one main holding, whose tenants in chief, according to a deed of c.1200-10, were the Brethren of the Hospital.32

The most important part of this holding was the aula, situated on the corner of Steep Hill and Christ's Hospital Terrace. This late twelfth century hall was for some time erroneously called 'Aaron the Jews House': Aaron's it most certainly was not, but it did at one time belong to a Jew known to him. Joces or Joscel of York, mentioned in the Hundred Rolls, may perhaps have built this magnificent house. It has been extensively renovated over the centuries, but yet retains a fair measure of its original quality, particularly in its external features. He was killed 'in the old war' which here probably means the York massacre of 1190.33

The other name, not associated with this property before 1217, was Willam of Tillobrook, a Bedfordshire magnate who held land in many areas of Lincolnshire, and had his capital messuage at Hardwick, near Saxilby. He married Eleanor de Baiocis and gave her this property as her dower c.1210.34 However, he was forced to surrender it to the King after the troubles of 1217,35 and three years later he was dead, murdered by various members and retainers of his wife's family.36

By c.1225 it was owned by Peter of Legbourne and his wife Joan. He, or she may have been connected to William by birth, as he had landholdings in Tillobrook itself.37 Under the Legbournes, parts of the property were divided and leased out; by 1250 the part north of the City Gate (i.e. 45 Steep Hill) was in the hands of Thorald Copper; after the death of Peter (before 1265) Joan renewed the lease. Thorald the Fruter held the range to the east of the aula, and after him came his nephew John.38

Joan died some time before 1273, and the various holdings came into the hands of Mag. William of Keston, a physician, a process which was complete by 1281.39 William, usually surmised Ruffys, died c.1300 and his executors founded a chantry in his name. This and other property provided five marks per annum towards the expenses.40 After this, the aula cannot again be identified from surviving records, and even quite recent documentation has eluded discovery, so we are unable to trace properly the tenemental history of one of Lincoln's finest old houses.

NOTES

2. Information from Stanley Jones.
5. Information from Richard Wood, Keeper at the Usher Art Gallery, where the drawing is to be seen.
7. Lincolnshire Archives Office (hereafter L.A.O.), Lincoln City Leases 84 (1717), where it is called the Baile yatstende; Rotuli Hundredorum, p.322a.
17. Jones, sites 14 and 15.
19. A. G. Vince & M. J. Jones, Lincoln's Buried Archaeological Heritage (1990), ON33. Observation recorded by Christopher Guy.
23. L.A.O. Dean and Chapter Common Fund composer Bij.3.4 and Bij.2.1, passim.
24. e.g. L.A.O. Dean and Chapter Bij.3.19: lease dated 21 September 1603.
26. Registrum Antiquissimum ... VIII, nos. 2297-99, passim.
27. L.A.O. Lincoln City White Book L1/3/1 fols 130v (Hynde); 122 (Sutty).
31. L.A.O. Dean and Chapter A.1.8 (Liber Ordinisibus Cantariarum), no. 197.
34. As note 32 above: this came several years after their marriage c.1199-99 for which see Pipe Roll 9 Ric. I, p.114 and Pipe Roll 10 Ric. I, p.6.
35. Rotuli Hundredorum, p.322a.
39. Ibid., nos. 722-7.
40. Ibid., nos. 728-9.